

# Better Bites Program Offers Kentucky Employees Healthier Meal Options

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*"I've never tried squash, but I loved it in the lasagna. Maybe I'd like it in other things too!"*

**Employee commenting on Better Bites menu options**

## Summary

The Kentucky Department of Public Health (KDPH) is dedicated to making the healthy choice the easy choice. KDPH formed a worksite wellness committee to address employee health issues and set up Better Bites pilot programs at three state department cafeterias. The program offers healthy meal options and smaller portion sizes. Now, more than 4,400 employees across all 3 worksites have improved access to healthy meal options that meet national food service guidelines. KDPH provided trainings and educational resources to participating sites.

## Challenge

According to a KDPH employee health report, about 78% of screened employees are overweight or obese; 31% have diabetes or prediabetes (fasting); and 44% are diagnosed with high blood pressure. The state's adult obesity rate is currently 31.6% according to the 2014 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Obesity is associated with an increased risk of chronic disease and increased health care costs. In addition, fewer than one in four (23%) Kentucky residents eat the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables each day, according to a 2013 Kentucky Health Issues Poll released in February 2014.

## Solution

In Kentucky, a Better Bites pilot program is making healthier food choices more available in cafeterias at three state agencies: the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Capital Annex, and the Transportation Cabinet in Kentucky. The program focuses on serving meals low in sodium, fat and sugar. Better Bites meals are also served in smaller portion sizes. Better Bites menus align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The guidelines for Better Bites improve menu choices and provides healthy eating options for employees. Pre and post surveys, and employee taste tests further helped to guide Better Bites menus.

## Your Involvement is Key

Learn more about the Better Bites program, visit <http://twenslex.org/better-bites> This project is supported by the State Public Health Actions to Prevent and Control Diabetes, Heart Disease, Obesity, and Associated Risk Factors and Promote School Health cooperative agreement (DP13-1305).

### Results

To increase awareness and gain momentum for the Better Bites programs, employees were provided discount meals, gift cards, t-shirts, and other incentives. A \$5 gift card was awarded to employees who bought Better Bites meals once a week for a month at participating worksites. Also, employees participating in evaluation surveys were entered into a drawing to win t-shirts and discounted meals. A culinary chef was hired to train food service staff and adapt six recipes to healthier cooking methods for the program. The purchase of a new commercial food processor enabled processing of large quantities of fresh fruits and vegetables. With these efforts, one day a week, employees at all three state agencies, can eat from Better Bites menus during meal times. In addition, food sales increased on days Better Bites were offered.

### Sustainable Success

In partnership with the Kentucky Department of Parks, KDPH will continue to offer Better Bites meal options at all three locations. They also have plans to offer the program every day—through Better Bites Express. This pre-packed meal option will maintain nutritional standards set by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2015-2020. It will also help sustain access to healthier eating options for employee's at all three state agencies. By carrying out the Better Bites and Better Bites Express programs, KDPH aims to prevent and control obesity, chronic disease, and other health conditions. Momentum for Better Bites continues to grow as local communities are setting up Better Bites in park concession stands.

## Contact

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### U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

#### Contact CDC

<http://www.cdc.gov/cdc-info/requestform.html>

#### Web site

<http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>

The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

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